

Spread the Word about Cancer

A Guide for
Black Americans



NATIONAL INSTITUTES
OF HEALTH
National Cancer Institute

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES
Public Health Service
National Institutes of Health

Thousands of black
American lives could
be saved over the next

10 years. Yours could be one of
them. The fact is, black Americans are
diagnosed with cancer and die from it
more often than any other group. But
many more could survive cancer if they
begin today to make a few changes in diet
and health habits. By spreading the word
about cancer and making some simple
lifestyle changes, you will be taking crucial
steps toward maintaining your health
and helping others to stay healthy.

Check the Facts

It is important to understand what is known about cancer in black Americans. By understanding the facts, you also will see how important your actions can be.



Lung Cancer

In recent years, the number of black American men who smoke has been decreasing. This fact is the good news. The bad news is that, among male smokers, black men tend to choose cigarettes with a higher tar and nicotine content, and they get lung cancer and smoking-related diseases more than white men.

Between 1973 and 1992, the rate of lung cancer in black American women increased more than 100 percent, and so did the death rate. For black American women, lung cancer is now the leading cause of cancer death.

Colorectal Cancer

Between 1973 and 1992, colorectal cancer in black American men increased 40 percent; in black American women, it increased 16 percent. And during this same period, the death rate from colon cancer for black men increased 23 percent.

Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death for black women. Between 1973 and 1992, breast cancer in black American women ages 50 and older increased more than 38 percent, and the death rate for this group increased 25 percent.



Cervical Cancer

Between 1973 and 1992, while overall cervical cancer diagnoses and deaths decreased for American women, black American women older than 50 remained more than twice as likely to develop cervical cancer and to die from it than white women. And for black American women under age 50, the incidence of cervical cancer was higher than that for white women in the same age group.

Prostate Cancer

Between 1973 and 1992, the rate of new diagnoses of prostate cancer in black American men increased at a rate of 126 percent, and the death rate increased 41 percent.

DID YOU KNOW?

**According to recent statistics,
the leading causes of cancer
death for black Americans are:**

BLACK MALES

- 1. Lung**
- 2. Prostate**
- 3. Colorectal**

BLACK FEMALES

- 1. Lung**
- 2. Breast**
- 3. Colorectal**

**Scientists estimate that about
120,000 cases of cancer in black
Americans will be found this year.***

**American Cancer Society,
Facts and Figures 1995; and National Cancer
Institute SEER Cancer Statistics Review: 1973-1992.*

Spread the Word

Thousands of black American lives could be saved if all could have a healthy diet, avoid smoking, and get regular cancer checkups.

Here are some ways you can take care of yourself and also help spread the word about cancer prevention and early detection.

Action Steps to a Healthy Diet

Experts agree that a healthy, balanced diet that is low in fat, moderate in calories, and rich in fiber may help you stay healthy and lower cancer risk. That means:

- ☞ Eat lots of fruits and vegetables, grains and beans.



- ☞ Include lean meat and low-fat dairy products in your diet.
- ☞ Go easy on fats.
- ☞ Maintain a healthy weight. Staying within a healthy weight range (check with your health care provider) can lower your risk for many cancers.



The National Cancer Institute, with its 5 A Day program, encourages Americans to eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Most fruits and vegetables are low in fat, are a good source of vitamins and minerals, and provide fiber. By eating the "5 A Day" way, you are eating your way to better health and decreasing your risk for many cancers.

DID YOU KNOW?

**One "5 A Day" serving
equals one of the following:**

**1 medium fruit or $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
of cut-up fruit**

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup of 100-percent juice

**$\frac{1}{2}$ cup raw or cooked
vegetables**

1 cup of leafy vegetable

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup of dried fruit

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup of beans or peas

Don't Smoke

Scientists know that smoking is directly linked to cancer. **The most important things to do are:**

- ☞ Never start smoking.
- ☞ If you do smoke, quit. The chances of getting lung cancer gradually decrease once a person stops smoking. Smoking causes most deaths from lung cancer — a cancer that accounts for more than a quarter of all cancer deaths among black Americans.
- ☞ Avoid breathing secondhand smoke, also known as environmental tobacco smoke. This smoke in the air threatens the health of



nonsmokers and increases their risk for heart and lung diseases, including cancer. Avoid secondhand smoke yourself, and protect your children from it. Always keep your living and work areas well ventilated.

Find Cancer Early

One of the most powerful steps you can take for good health is to get regular checkups. Help your doctor to find cancer early, when it is most treatable. Cancer in its earliest stage rarely has warning signs.

- ☞ Get regular exams by your doctor and ask to be checked for cancer. Research shows that Pap tests, mammograms, and colon cancer tests all can save lives. Ask your doctor about these tests.
- ☞ Get a second opinion. If your exam and tests show that you may have cancer, a second doctor's opinion can help you make one of the most important decisions in your life. Many patients think that asking for an independent second opinion will offend the first doctor they saw. Actually, getting a second opinion is a normal medical practice. Your doctor can help you with this effort.

Get Involved

Getting involved includes more than taking care of yourself. It also means reaching out to help others take care of themselves. These messages about diet, smoking, and finding cancer early cannot reach your community without your help. Spread the word! **Here's what you can do:**

- ☞ Stay informed and share your knowledge with others. The National Cancer Institute (NCI) has the Cancer Information Service (CIS) available to provide you with free information about cancer. The CIS also provides a no-cost nationwide telephone service for cancer patients, their families and friends, the public, and health care professionals. Trained cancer information specialists can answer your questions and send you free booklets about cancer. They also may know about local resources and services. One toll-free number, 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237), connects callers with the office that serves their area.
- ☞ You can help. NCI has a program called the National Black Leadership Initiative on Cancer (NBLIC) to help black American communities increase their cancer awareness. The NBLIC conducts community-based



activities through churches, special groups, and service organizations to help change attitudes and spread the word about cancer. Many community-based groups around the country, including health professionals and community volunteers, hold health fairs, screening programs, educational seminars, and other activities right in your neighborhood. If you want more information about upcoming programs in your area or want to get involved with the NBLIC, call the CIS at 1-800-4-CANCER to request the telephone number for the NBLIC regional coordinator for your area.

Spread the Word about Cancer

Take charge of your health by eating right, not smoking, seeing your doctor regularly, and getting involved. Spread the word about fighting cancer in your community. You will help yourself and other black Americans.

For more information, call the
National Cancer Institute's
Cancer Information Service at
1-800-4-CANCER
(1-800-422-6237).



NIH Publication No. 96-3412
Revised November 1995